(c) Steps have initiated to get all the vacancies in the scientific cadre filled up on top priority basis for which the recruitment process is in different stages at the Agricultural Scientists' Recruitment Board (ASRB).

Increasing of alkaline elements in soil

†1. SHRI LALIT KISHORE CHATURVEDI: Will the MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that because of continuous use of chemical fertilizers the quantity of alkaline elements in the soil in most parts of the country is increasing continuously resulting in the decrease in soil fertility;

(b) if so, what measures are being taken to check the same; and

(c) if not, the quantum of increase in production per hectare annually during each of the past five years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) to (c) At present per hectare consumption of the Chemical Fertilizer is 104.5 Kg. This level of consumption of fertilizer does not seem to have any ill effect on soil fertility and its producitivity. Investigations conducted under All India Coordinated Research Project on "Long Term Fertilizer Experiments" over few decades at different locations in the country didn't reveal any such instances. However, Governments is promoting balanced use of fertilizers to maintain soil fertility.

Popularising MSP

2. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) what is Minimum Support Price (MSP) and how the same is fixed and beneficial to the farmers;

(b) whether the report of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) has revealed that almost 71 per cent of farmers had not even heard of the concept of Minimum Support Price (MSP) and almost 81 per cent of farmers were effectively unaware of how to use the MSP; and

(c) if so, the steps taken to generate awareness about MSP operations amongst farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) Minimum Support Price (MSP) is in the nature of a minimum guaranteed price for the farmers offered by the Government for their produce in case the market prices fall below that level. If the market offers higher price than MSP, the farmers are free to sell at that price. The Government announces MSP for specified agricultural commodities on the basis of recommendation of Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP), the views of the State Governments and Central Ministries as well as such other factors considered important for fixation of support prices. The CACP, while formulating its recommendations on price policy considers important factors like cost of production, changes in input prices, productivity of different crops across States, demand supply situation, domestic and international price trends, terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, need for crop diversification, resource use efficiency and food security.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.